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BALSA membership survey June 2016

Key insights

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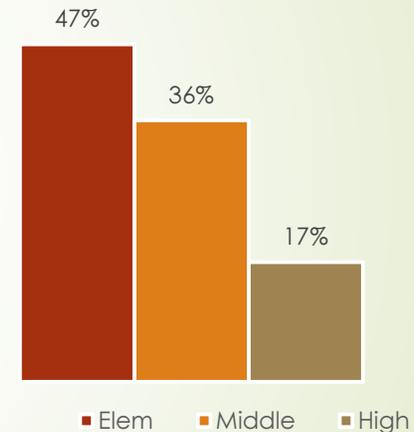
Survey base

- Invitation sent to 270 valid email addresses
 - 130 (48%) on Balsa Google group
 - 140 (52%) on email only
- 53 replies received over 5 days
 - 20% reply rate
 - 52 valid for analysis, 1 incomplete

School background

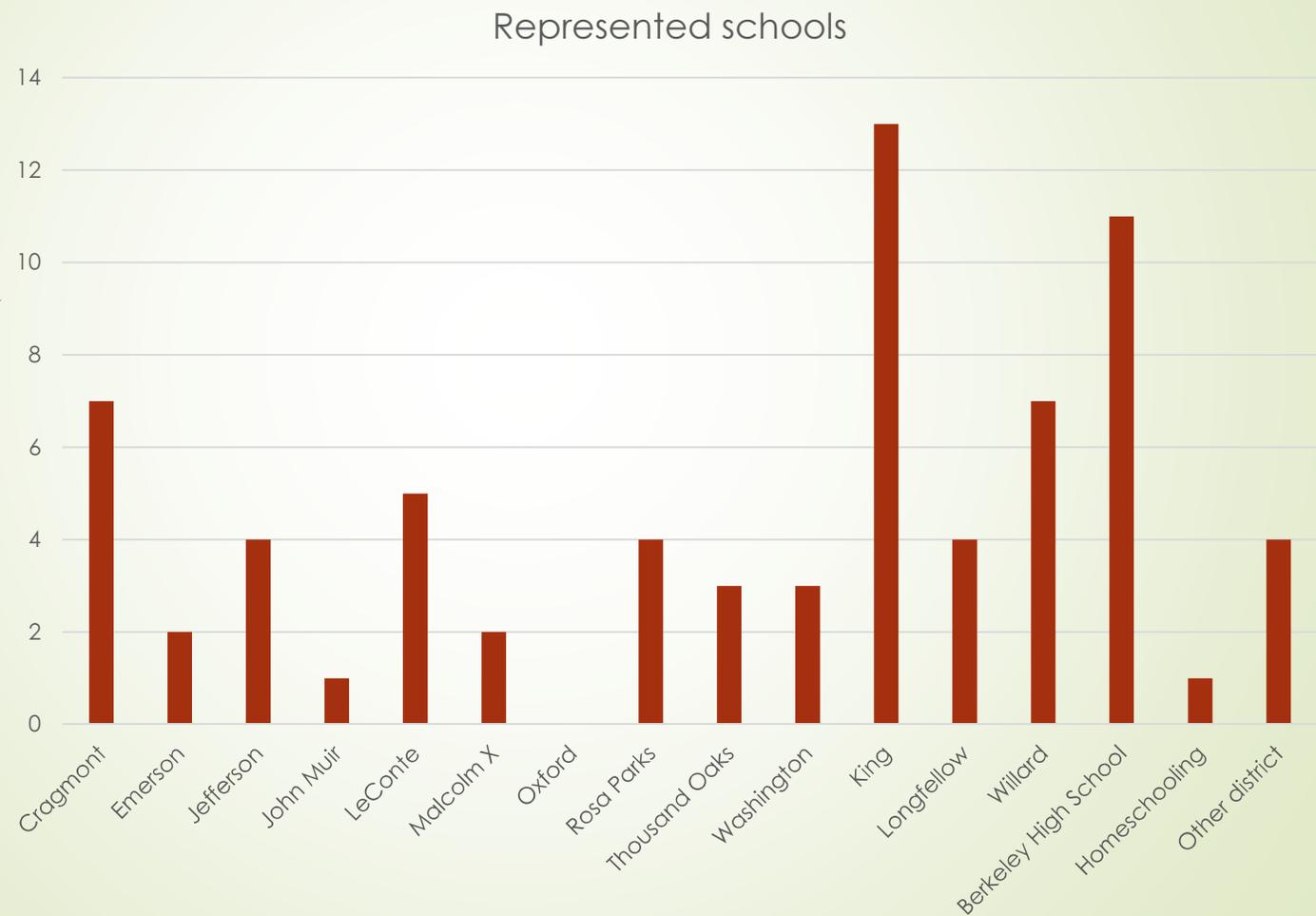
- Most families (90% of all replies) have kids in BUSD
 - Primarily in elementary schools
 - 53% of population is beginning to age out of identification "sweet spot"

BUSD kids in survey

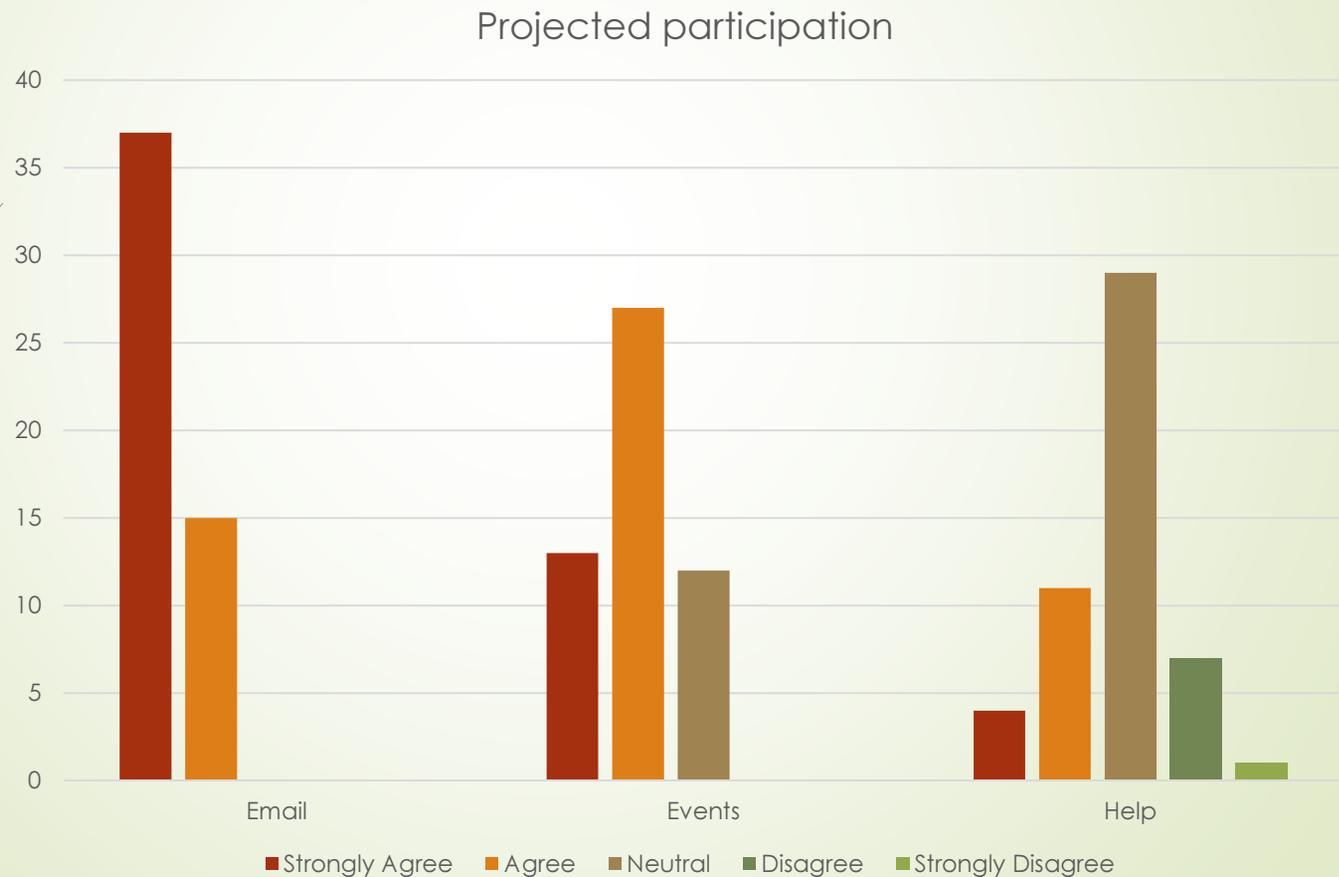


- 5 non-BUSD/"non-standard" replies
 - 1 homeschooler
 - 2 from private schools (Prospect Serra, The Berkeley School; German International School)
 - 2 from other districts (Alameda, Oakland)

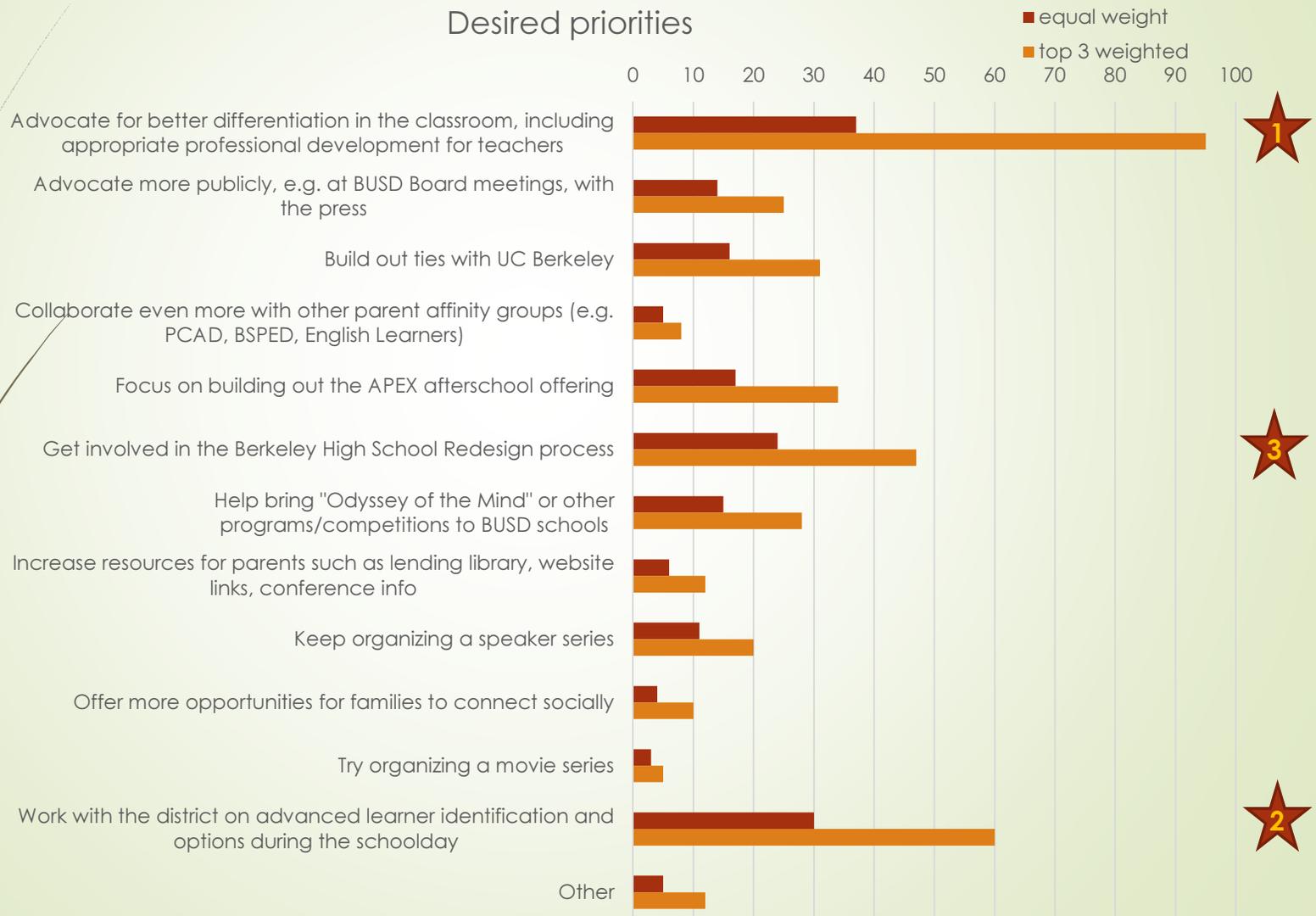
Replies by school



While all families want to stay on email and over $\frac{3}{4}$ like to attend events, only $\frac{1}{4}$ are planning to help



3 top priorities emerged



Open entries from “Other priorities”

- ▶ If I could have picked #4 it would have been social connection opportunities with other BALSAs families.
- ▶ I also think it is important for families to connect, and the speaker series does this to some extent.
- ▶ Focus should be on options for the kids, during the school day. I am much less interested in parent meetings etc. I don't know what the other parent affinity groups do, so can't speak to a priority there.
- ▶ Advanced math learning at the middle and high school levels IN the classroom. Even elementary if possible.
- ▶ Afterschool programs that cater to advanced learners
- ▶ Building ties with UCB sounds like a good idea also...
- ▶ Comment: the BHS redesign process will continue to include many opportunities for advanced learners. More of a priority is giving the opportunities for younger students, especially those who may not be recognized as GATE, so that they are ready to take advantage of the opportunities at BHS.
- ▶ Self-contained classroom for highly/exceptionally/profoundly gifted kids. We need this desperately!

Further ideas/concerns - 1/3

- Focus should not be on advocacy for advanced learners, but personalized learning and differentiation/PD for teachers. There are active initiatives in other schools (such as Summit Public Schools) that BUSD can learn from.
- It's a great list!
- My son has been diagnosed at UC Berkeley Psych dept with both a gifted IQ and learning disabilities. I am afraid that these will "equal out", and whatever identification process for gifted students BUSD eventually puts in place will fail to identify him. This leads to my reluctance to participate in Balsa more. I am afraid of putting my limited resources into an effort that may never end up benefiting my son.
- Ask Evans about pushing forward a GATE offering
- Advocate with the District for thoughtfulness around advance learner placement, so the teacher-student fit works. This HAS been our experience this past year and it has made all of the difference!
- I am hearing from teachers that the district administration is pushing more rigid teaching plans with less discretion for the teacher. This strikes me as highly likely to reduce opportunities for high performing students to receive extra work and flexibility to be creative learners. I would like to hear how Balsa is working with teachers and supporting teachers to maintain their control in the classroom.
- I have a 2nd grader who's known division since kindergarten and still has to sit through an hour a day of basic addition. I'm extremely disappointed about the loss of honors math in the middle schools. And I'm concerned about the BHS redesign and possibility that there won't be any advanced classes till 11th grade which I think is too late. I do understand the need for universal 9th to assure better equity through the schools, but I don't understand the dissolution of IB and AC after that....
- Can Balsa meetings be changed to Thursday or Friday evenings? It's difficult to attend the meetings on Monday evenings.
- I think we need to push BUSD to formally commit to its priorities of key potentially conflicting educational tenets. - Providing equal access to appropriate course work according to learning level - Reducing the achievement gap

Further ideas/concerns – 2/3

- I continue to be interested but I have become generally disillusioned with the prospect of my "gifted" children receiving an excellent education in the BUSD schools because there is no formal gate program. Getting involved with the world-class university in our backyard seems awesome. Redesigning the high school is important if not "too little too late" for our children to excel. Odyssey of the Mind would be awesome but when -- when my kindergartner is in tenth grade?
- I've heard that one possibility for the redesign would be to get rid of AP classes, in particular English and history. This is part of a general hostility toward advanced learners at BHS. If possible, this issue should be reframed so that it is not seen as a privileged, white cause, but an equity issue. Also, many of the problematic teachers such as Mizbani in AP Chemistry and Henri for Advanced Core are regularly assigned to advanced learners when everyone knows these teachers get lots of complaints every year. I'm not sure what can be done about this, but one could say that it deprives less privileged students of the opportunity to take challenging classes because these teachers require the services of private tutors for students to learn. I also recommend you contact Christine Staples, christineannestaples at gmail, who conducted a survey of AC students, their homework load, stress level and use of private tutors, about the challenges of AP classes.
- BALSA topics are probably most pressing in elementary school, and to some degree in middle school - it would be good to find allies (teachers? school psychologists?) and most volunteers from there.
- My son is advanced in math and has often complained to me that he is not learning anything new in math in the classroom, that he hates math time in school. I have talked to his teacher about the situation. The teacher suggested that I looked into enrolling him in after-school enrichment programs. I did not think it was a good solution, as my son would continue to hate math time during the school day. I am very concerned that his teacher does not have the strategies and/or the capacity to differentiate instruction so that my son would feel challenged. I am also concerned that there is no expectation or accountability from principals that teachers differentiate their instruction to challenge advanced learners.
- Thanks for everything BALSA has been doing! Let's get more recognition and less leadership burnout. Anything that makes/keeps kids thinking being smart is fun, and their adults keeping high expectations, would be great!

Further ideas/concerns – 3/3

- I thought this Wired article was interesting, and maybe has some lessons that could be applied here (though I'm not an educator and would be interested to hear what someone with professional knowledge has to say): <http://www.wired.com/2013/10/free-thinkers/>
- Though my child is several years off from attending Berkeley High School, I am very concerned about the redesign as it was depicted in a Berkeleyside article published in early June. I feel the current redesign proposal undercuts the needs of advanced learners, and would like to see BALSAs take an active role in future iterations of the redesign to ensure -- among other issues -- that the Academic Choice and International Baccalaureate programs are kept intact. I will also add here a fourth priority, listed in the items above: It would be helpful to advertise more widely what BALSAs is and how families can get involved. Perhaps having a meeting at each school one time each academic year would help raise awareness? At Jefferson School, where my child attends, there seems to be little awareness about BALSAs, but I believe many families there would be interested in the group.
- Can reminder announcements for events be sent a week in advance? For those of us on digest, it is easy not to get them before events/speakers.
- Thank you for all you have done.
- Share resources with each other, including online, classes, etc.
- Advocate for honors classes at Berkeley High starting in 9th grade.
- Teaching technology safety within schools and coordinate with parents.
- There are *no* meaningful GATE programs whatsoever in any of the districts in this area. For our most extreme learners, school is a debilitating, traumatic experience. My son is PG and I have watched him suffer horribly for 3 yrs in OUSD, despite all of my advocacy. We need a self-contained magnet program for these extreme end of the spectrum kids. L.A. has it, San Diego has it, Portland and Seattle have them, other cities have them. We need one here!
- We are moving to Portland so will no longer be in the area. Good luck with BALSAs! It's a great group.